

XI.—*Letters, Extracts, Notices, &c.*

WE have received the following letters addressed to "The Editors of 'The Ibis'":—

SIRS,—I have read Dr. Selah Merrill's paper on the Birds of Palestine ('Ibis,' 1903, p. 321) with mingled feelings of disappointment and satisfaction—of disappointment that so energetic a collector, with many to assist him, should in four whole years have been able to make so insignificant an addition to the avifauna of the country; of satisfaction at the proof thus afforded that the country had been already pretty thoroughly worked.

Of the nine birds which Dr. Merrill has added to the list it is unfortunate that he has omitted to give either the date of capture or the locality. But of these, the Golden-eye, the Common Sheldrake, the White-tailed Plover, and Nordmann's Pratincole are all well-known wanderers in winter over the Levant and the Red Sea.

The Brambling and the Yellow-hammer are regular winter visitants to Asia Minor, and might naturally go a little further, to Palestine. The occurrence of the Red-necked Phalarope is interesting, though not surprising, as it has been taken at Aden, Karachi, and even at Madras. The Slender-billed Curlew (*Numenius tenuirostris*) is certainly a rare bird everywhere, and well worth notice.

As to the Lineated Cuckoo, called by Dr. Merrill *Cuculus leptodetus* (really a synonym of *C. gularis*), which occurs on the Nile, it is possible that Dr. Merrill may be right; but the species is so like our Common Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*) that I should be unwilling to accept it unless on the authority of an expert.

In his five pages of criticism on my Catalogue the doctor really asserts too much. His very first criticism is on the Rock-Thrush, which I say "is a passing stranger tarrying but a night." Though I do not say that it returns in autumn, surely anyone would have understood that to be the case with a migratory bird.

Of the Hermit Fantail (*Drynaea inquieta*) I state that

it is very scarce wherever found; but the remark on this statement is that it is "quite common." I venture to suggest that the bird which the doctor saw may have been the common Fantail of the country (*D. gracilis*).

With regard to the Sun-birds it is suggested that those found at Jaffa may be of a distinct species from the Sun-bird of the Jordan Valley. I certainly demur to this. I found a Sun-bird identical with that of the Jordan Valley south of Mt. Carmel. When I worked on birds in Palestine, more than ten years ago, there was very little cultivation about Jaffa; it is now embosomed in a vast tract of orange-groves and gardens. What could be more natural than that emigrants from the south of Mt. Carmel should take up their abode in a district so admirably suited to their habits? The extension of the range of Tristram's Serin (*Serinus canonicus*) from the highlands of Lebanon to the neighbourhood of Jerusalem is certainly interesting.

Now on the African Buzzard (*Buteo desertorum*) I wrote "this may probably be entered among the birds of Palestine, though I have never obtained a specimen." On this Dr. Merrill's comment is, "As Dr. Tristram says, it has never been found in Palestine." This is scarcely fair criticism. But I will not encroach upon your space by further examples of what I may call rather carping remarks, though under the guise of "additions." In making my list I was careful to include nothing that I had not myself obtained, or that had not been brought to me in the flesh. In other cases I simply stated, when I had been told that the bird was found, that it *probably* existed there. My exploration was completed in one year, and, of course, I never dreamed of claiming to have come across every bird that visits the country.

I may mention that Dr. Merrill, when in England, wrote to me upon his supposed discovery of a "new Sun-bird." I expressed my incredulity, and suggested that, as is well known, there are great varieties of seasonal plumage in these birds. Dr. Merrill offered to shew me the specimens, but unfortunately found that they had been packed away for transport to America.

It should be remembered that when I state that I found a bird in one locality it is not to be assumed that I imply that it occurs in no other. Had I had four years instead of one in which to work I should doubtless have increased my localities tenfold.

Yours &c.,

College, Durham,
Sept. 25th, 1903.

H. B. TRISTRAM.

SIRS,—In Dresser's 'Manual of Palaearctic Birds,' among the species of the genus *Æstrelata*, I find *Æ. mollis* (p. 856) with the *habitat* given as "The Southern Seas of the Atlantic north to Madeira."

In two papers of mine, one on the birds of Cape Verde Islands collected by Signor Leonardo Fea (Ann. Mus. Civ. Gen. (2) xx. pp. 283-312), and the other "On *Æstrelata mollis* (Gould) and the Allied Species living at Madeira and the Cape Verde Islands" ('Ibis,' 1900, pp. 298-303), I believe that I have shown conclusively that the bird from the Southern Seas (*Æ. mollis*) is specifically different from that living in Madeira and the Cape Verde Islands, which I have named *Æ. feæ*. It appears that these papers must have escaped Mr. Dresser's notice.

Yours &c.,

Zoological Museum, Turin,
6th December, 1903.

T. SALVADORI.

Bird-life on the Upper Nile.—Descending the Upper Nile from Lake Albert to Dufileh, Capt. C. A. Sykes, in his well-written volume on 'Service and Sport on the Tropical Nile,' describes the bird-life of that part of the great River as follows:—"In the early morning the birds were always the attraction. Amongst the reeds would generally be some ibises and herons with their wings hung out to dry the damp of the previous night, blinking in the rising sun and making preparations to enjoy the day. Dark red waders with their white caps and long legs would be scudding about the surface of floating vegetation, sometimes rising to fly forty or fifty

paces, but always preferring to be on their feet. Peeping down some small tributary one might catch a glimpse of the solemn whale-headed stork (*Baleniceps rex*) slowly waking to the world and pluming himself. In the reeds and grass might be seen gorgeous crimson finches hopping about from stalk to stalk and sparkling in the sun; and by the banks many kinds of Bee-eaters with lustrous metallic red and green plumage, darting about and snapping up their food; or close to the glassy surface of the water might come swiftly flying a tiger kingfisher, in grey and white. In the calms, duck and teal would be floating about, to get under wing at our approach and fly away. In the swampy parts, snipe would suddenly get up squawking and protesting at our intrusion into such undesirable spots. Beautiful little blue-birds would flit about the mimosa trees, upon which also might be seen hung innumerable fruit-eating bats. High up in the heavens some magnificent eagle might be making a journey, and slowly circling above would be most likely the ever-present vultures and marabou storks. At night, or during the twilight, the night-jar would appear with his uneven flight, awakening the silence with a beautiful liquid voice. The species peculiar to these parts is very weird, for it has two little pennants flying behind it, attached by long sinews to the wings. It uses these pennants in the most wonderful manner. When the bird settles on the ground, *it raises them erect to mimic grasses in flower*, and, with its body lying close to the ground, looking for all the world like a small tuft, it is passed by undetected. The females lay their eggs on the bare ground, and so do not have to move on the approach of danger. Unconscious of their presence, I have often put them up just as I was about to tread on them. Though their note is sweet-sounding, it becomes most distressing to a sick man trying to get to sleep, and many a time have they been cursed for their songs." [This quotation includes a very interesting observation. The Nightjar in question is, no doubt, *Macrodipteryx longipennis*, and this may be the explanation of its very curious wing-structure. In Newton's 'Dictionary of

Birds' (p. 611) will be found a figure representing the bird on the ground with its elongated primaries raised exactly in the way described by Capt. Sykes.—EDD.]

Mr. Robert Hall's Expedition to the Lena.—Our readers will be glad to know that our energetic Australian correspondent, Mr. Robert Hall, has safely accomplished his projected journey from Melbourne to London, *viâ* Vladivostok and Siberia, as announced in April last ('Ibis,' 1903, p. 270), and, after a short visit to his ornithological and other friends in England and on the Continent, has returned to his home in Australia. Not only so, but Mr. Hall, on his route across Siberia, made a most interesting excursion from Irkutsk down the valley of the river Lena, and formed a good collection of birds, which is now in the Tring Museum.

Reaching Irkutsk on June 4th of last year, Mr. Hall immediately proceeded on a four-days' coach-journey to Verkholsk, the head of regular navigation on the Upper Lena, where he arrived on June 9th. Here an open boat was engaged for a five days' drift down the river. The course was continued in a stern-wheel steamer to Yakutsk, the capital of the great province of the same name. Mr. Hall and his companion, Mr. R. E. Trebilcock, were able to collect a few birds every day while the steamer stopped to take in wood for fuel. At Yakutsk a short excursion was made into the interior, and examples of some interesting birds were secured on their breeding-grounds. On their return to Yakutsk an offer was made to the travellers to join a small steamer going down to the mouth of the Lena to convey provisions to a Russian Exploring Expedition. This was gladly accepted, and on July 6th the party reached Boulun, where the fir-trees began to become scanty and the hills to be bare of timber. On July 12th they were at Larix Island, just within the mouth of the Lena, about 72° N. lat. Here the first piece of true tundra was met with and thousands of Waders were seen. The mosquitoes between Irkutsk and Boulun, some 1400 miles distant, were almost unbearable. On August 21st, Mr. Hall and his companion reached Irkutsk on their return

journey with a collection of 401 bird-skins from this little-known corner of Asia, and brought them safe, *viâ* Moscow and St. Petersburg, to London.

Dr. Bowdler Sharpe.—Dr. Sharpe is enjoying a well-earned rest in the steam-yacht ‘Emerald,’ in which some kind friends have offered him a place for a winter-tour in the West Indies. The ‘Emerald’ left Nice, where Dr. Sharpe joined her, on Nov. 18th last, and was at Funchal, Madeira, “weather-bound,” on Dec. 4th.

Winter-cruise of the ‘Valhalla.’—Lord Crawford left the Solent on Dec. 16th last in the R.Y.S. ‘Valhalla’ for a winter-cruise in the West Indies, and again took with him our friend Mr. M. J. Nicoll as naturalist. After calling at Teneriffe, the ‘Valhalla’ will proceed straight to her destination, and will visit the various islands of the Greater and Lesser Antilles. The ‘Valhalla’ is expected to return to Cowes about the beginning of June.

Birds in the Curtis Museum, Alton, Hants.—Two members of the B. O. U. who have recently paid a visit to the “Curtis Museum” at Alton do not give us a very satisfactory account of the condition of the collection of Birds there. It is a pity that this collection should be neglected, because it contains examples of a good many local species, and Alton is only four miles distant from Selborne, which is, of course, a place of predominant interest to naturalists. Our friends report to us that the whole series of birds, which consists of some three hundred specimens mounted and kept in glass cases, requires to be cleaned up, labelled, and rearranged. It would be desirable to have the scientific as well as the English names attached to the new labels, which should, moreover, be *in print*. There is a fine specimen of an Owl among them, which is labelled “Snowy Owl from Scotland,” but is certainly one of the Hawk-Owls, probably *Surnia funerea*, and there are other specimens wrongly named. As there are several members of the B. O. U. resident at Alton and in its neighbourhood, we

trust that they will take this matter in hand without delay, as little appears to have been done to the Collection of Birds for the last few years.

The Chalkley Collection at Winchester College.—No ornithologist who goes to Winchester should fail to inspect the collection of birds in the Memorial Buildings at the College, which was formed by Mr. W. Chalkley and acquired by the College three years ago. With the assistance of the Rev. J. E. Kelsall, Dr. Fearon (the late Head Master) has prepared and printed a catalogue of it, which contains the names of 145 species, arranged according to the B. O. U. List, with a few terse remarks on each of them. "Care has been taken that no single bird should be included that has not been actually found in the County." Fourteen "*Aves desiderate*" are specified, among which are some (Whinchat, Redstart, and Tree-Pipit) that might be easily provided by residents in Hampshire.

Hart's Museum, Christchurch.—We are glad to be able to state that a strong effort is being made to secure the continued existence of Mr. Hart's well-known collection at Christchurch, in Hampshire, as a public Museum. A conditional arrangement has been made by the town of Bournemouth, where a free site will be provided, and a very influential Committee has been appointed to carry out the plan. The Corporation of Bournemouth has also agreed to contribute one-half of the price of its acquisition, and the remainder is being raised by public subscription. The Honorary Treasurer of the fund to be provided for this purpose is Mr. Durance George, National Provincial Bank of England, Bournemouth, who will be glad to receive contributions. The scheme deserves the support of all ornithologists, as the principal feature of the Museum, although it contains other objects of natural history, is the large series of mounted birds, mostly obtained by Mr. Edward Hart himself in the New Forest and adjoining districts, which fills about 420 cases and contains some 1350 specimens. A

catalogue of the collection was printed at Southampton in 1894. It enumerates specimens of 281 species, and is arranged according to the B. O. U. List.

Proposed Experiment on Bird-migration.—We are requested by Herr J. Thienemann, the Director of the Ornithological Station at Rossitten, on the Baltic coast of East Prussia (*cf.* Bull. B. O. C. xi. p. 68), to call the attention of British ornithologists to an experiment, as regards the migration of birds, which it is proposed to carry on there. Every year during the two migration-seasons hundreds, and, in some years, thousands, of Crows (*Corvus corone* and *C. frugilegus*) are caught alive in nets by the fowlers at Rossitten. These birds are to be liberated, each with a small metal ring bearing a number and date attached to one foot. Persons who capture or kill any of these marked birds are requested to return the foot and ring to the “Vogel-warte, Rossitten, East Prussia,” sending with them an exact note of the date and place at which the bird was shot or captured. It is quite possible that some of these birds may wander as far as the shores of Great Britain. If this should happen we hope that Herr Thienemann’s request may be complied with.

A record will be kept at Rossitten of the feet and rings returned, and it is expected that some useful information on the migration of birds may result from this experiment.

Proposed new General Work on Birds.—M. P. Wytsman (of 108 Boulevard du Nord, Brussels) has sent us the prospectus of a new work to be called ‘Genera Avium,’ and to be carried out on the same plan as his ‘Genera Insectorum,’ which is now in course of issue. The size adopted will be a large quarto, “each family of birds being published separately with separate pagination.” It will be illustrated by plain and coloured plates, and will be written in English. M. Wytsman claims to have secured the assistance of a “Committee of the best Ornithologists in the world.” The issue of the ‘Genera Avium’ will be commenced as soon as the names of 150 subscribers have been received.

Bertoni's 'Aves nuevas del Paraguay.'—Through the kindness of our much-esteemed correspondent, Dr. H. von Ihering, of São Paulo, Brazil, we have now received a copy of this memoir, a critique on which, by Señor Arribalzaga, has been noticed in a preceding number ('Ibis,' 1903, p. 606). We think that enough has been said about this production; but possibly M. Bertoni can justify his statements by sending a set of his birds from the Upper Paraguay (where he made, no doubt, a good collection) to one of the principal Museums of Europe for correct determination. We have little doubt that our fellow-workers at South Kensington would undertake the task.

Obituary.—DR. EDWARD HAMILTON. The late Edward Hamilton, M.D., F.L.S., V.P.Z.S., &c., though not a professed ornithologist, was a much esteemed Member of our Union, to which he was elected in 1886. He died at his London residence, 25 Redcliffe Gardens, South Kensington, on the 31st of August last, and will be missed by a large circle of friends and acquaintances, to whom he was endeared by his kind and genial disposition. Hamilton was born in 1815, and educated at Harrow and University College, London. Having been a pupil of the late well-known Dr. Quin, he took to homœopathy, and was for many years one of the most successful practitioners in that branch of Medicine. He had large sympathies with Science, and up to a very recent period was a constant attendant at many of the Scientific Institutions of the West End. At the Councils and Meetings of the Zoological Society of London he was a well-known figure, and was one of the Vice-Presidents of the Society for more than thirty years. In 1890 Hamilton published a popular scientific work called 'The Riverside Naturalist,' in which the various forms of life met with on streams and rivers were described, and in 1896 a volume on the 'Wild Cat of Europe.' He was also the editor of 'Records of Sport in Southern India,' extracted from the journals of his brother, the late Col. Douglas Hamilton, a well-known Indian sportsman.